

March 19, 2019

To: pdtestimony@cga.ct.gov

CC: Will.Haskell@cga.ct.gov, Gail.Lavielle@cga.ct.gov

Subject: Opposition to HB 7912

Members of the Planning and Development Committee-

I am writing to express my strong objection to all sections of HB 7192 pertaining to school regionalization, specifically sections 7 through 10 of HB 7192. I also object to SB 874, and to any other bill that proposes the creation of a commission to study redistricting or consolidation of school services or school districts, or that forces implementation of school redistricting, consolidation, or regionalization.

I won't sit here and claim that I am deeply knowledgeable about education policy, nor that I have the financial expertise to advise on how to dig Connecticut out of its dire financial situation, but what I do bring is the perspective of a Mom in Connecticut. Specifically, a full-time working Mom who evaluates every decision in front of me with the lens of what will be best for my children. I also bring the perspective of a person who made the decision to move to this state for the schools, and who would make the decision to leave the state should our towns no longer be able to maintain or increase the quality of education provided to our children.

I will tell you in no uncertain terms that what we are hearing about in these bills has fundamentally shifted the conversations that my husband and I are having. Three months ago we were focusing on how we could more substantively contribute to our community, now we talk about whether we made a poor decision to move our family to Connecticut. We're now talking about where the line is for us – what would force us to make the decision to cut our losses and leave the state – and the truth is that this all boils down to the quality of the schools in our town.

We've heard a lot of words about these bills, and many different perspectives on what they are really about. We've seen Governor Lamont come to Fairfield County to assure us that his bills aren't about changing our schools, and that the bills should not include any reference to redistricting, yet the word "redistricting" remains on Line 446 and six more times in HB 7912. We've seen some members of the Education Committee respond in an aggressive and antagonistic manner towards public citizens who chose to testify against SB874. We've seen some legislators scoff at the idea that these bills are causing distress in our communities. All of this builds a pervasive perception that Hartford is coming after Fairfield County residents and schools, and that the number one thing that has brought MANY families to our town is now at significant risk.

I know definitively that perception matters. It impacts people's decision making. The perception of these bills, and the specter of a year and half plus of uncertainty while a commission studies and provides recommendations on regionalization and redistricting, means that Connecticut and Fairfield County now have a perception problem. The lack of clarity on how the recommendations from this commission could become law, the extended timeline laid out in the bill, and the fact that the commission would be made up of appointed rather than elected members all increase the perception of risk, and the perception that the result could be highly damaging to our schools and to student outcomes. That has an impact, and not a good one.

We know that people choose to come to Wilton for the schools, and often when their kids are out of the school system, they choose to leave the town – the schools are what bring people here and keep them here. We know that the quality of the schools is a selling point when Wilton tries to attract businesses to our town. We know that businesses trying to recruit employees rely on a selling point of quality of education. Were you to put through Sections 7 through 10 of this bill, you must expect that you will be playing a hand in pushing current residents and businesses out of the state, and in preventing new residents and businesses from coming to the state. As I said above, I'm just a working Mom and I'm not a financial expert, but given the dire fiscal situation Connecticut is in, I'm very sure that this can't be a desired outcome for this committee.

I urge you to consider all perspectives on regionalization that you've heard today, in last Friday's hearing on HB 7319, and in all of the testimony submitted against SB 874, and to oppose the provisions in HB 7192 that pertain to regionalization. Please allow our towns to retain local control of our education system and to continue making smart and efficient decisions about how to run the schools in our communities.

Sincerely,

Caroline Unger
Wilton